In this context, the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, has invited the Minister of Petroleum of Pakistan to hold further discussions on the issue, and to also explore cooperation possibilities for the export of diesel from India to Pakistan.

Invitation to President Bush

745. SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister has invited United States President Bush to visit India; and

(b) the response of President Bush to this invitation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) Yes, during their meeting in September 21,2004 in New York, Prime Minister extended an invitation to U.S. President Bush to visit India.

(b) President Bush's response was positive.

Increase in freight rates for tankers

746. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the increase in crude prices since September, 2004 has culminated in a jump in shipping rates;

(b) if so, the freight rates for various categories of tankers in early September and at present;

(c) whether charter rates for very large crude carriers per day have almost doubled and if so, the reasons therefor; and